

# APPLE TAKES A HAMMER TO A HARD-CORE '1984'

By PATRICK GOLDSTEIN

**G**eorge Orwell expected that a lot of strange things would come to pass in 1984.

A drab, colorless society would be ruled by an electronic dictatorship. History would be erased and re-written. Big Brother would be watching.

But even the world's foremost social prophet would be amazed to find his gloomy, futuristic fable, "Nineteen Eighty-Four," being used to sell computers.

In what has already been called the advertising coup of the year, Apple Computer Inc. startled millions of viewers with a barrage of Orwellian-style TV ads for the company's new Macintosh computer. The 60-second spots aired over a six-day period in late January, including a Super Bowl broadcast spot, as well being shown in nearly 800 movie theaters around the country.

However, the ads bear little resemblance to the usual folksy commercials designed to persuade you that computers are as friendly as a pet poodle.

Set in a bleak, post-industrial netherworld, the commercial opens onto an auditorium full of shaven-headed clones sitting spellbound in front of an enormous screen. His face filling the screen, a menacing Big Brother figure harangues his docile subjects, shouting, "The thugs and wreckers have been cast

out. The poisonous weeds of disinformation have been consigned to the dustbin of history. . . ."

Suddenly an athletic woman races into the hall, pursued by police. Before they can reach her, she hurls a hammer at the screen, setting off a huge explosion.

Only then comes an announcement hailing the arrival of Apple's

*Please see APPLE'S, Page 6*

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ROSEMARY KAUL / Los Angeles Times



*Chiat/Day advertising agency's Brent Thomas, left, Steve Hayden with storyboard core of their Macintosh television commercial.*

# APPLE'S TV AD

*Continued from Page 1*

Macintosh, boasting that its easy accessibility will help you "see why 1984 won't be like '1984.'"

If commercials are supposed to grab your attention, this is one bound for the Hall of Fame. All three major networks ran items on the commercial on their news shows, as did the BBC in Britain. Steven Spielberg called the Apple company to find out who made the commercial. An Apple spokesman said that in the six hours after the Macintoshes became available, consumers had bought \$3.5-million's worth of them.

"We weren't trying to rewrite history," explained the spot's writer, Steve Hayden, a creative director at the Chiat/Day advertising agency. "We wanted to show the democratization of technology. The whole point we wanted to make was that a world run by computers isn't so scary if you're running the computer."

One reason the spot has caused such a commotion is because it breaks a cardinal rule of advertising by reminding the consumer of the negative aspects of a sponsor's product. But an enormous part of the spot's appeal is its striking resemblance to a host of visually arresting MTV videos and futuristic films.

If the commercial, which cost close to \$500,000, had a rock sound track, it could easily be a new David Bowie video. "That's why you see so much cross-pollination between videos, commercials and films," Hayden said.

According to the Chiat/Day creative team, the similarities are no coincidence. The ad's huddled masses were recruited during a casting call for London skinheads, who can often be seen massed in front of the stage at British rock concerts. And the commercial was directed by Ridley Scott, who was a commercials director in England before he made "Blade Runner" and "Alien."

According to Brent Thomas, the agency's art director, Scott even borrowed some visual ideas for the commercial from the film version of H.G. Wells' "Shape of Things to Come," another dystopian vision of the future. "We wanted the whole spot to remind you of a place like East Germany—you know, the failed socialist look," Thomas said.

"Scott and production designer Michael Seymour (who also worked on "Alien") took a look at the 'Things to Come' stills and dressed the set with these old Rolls-Royce airplane engines that they had rescued from the scrap heap. Ridley even got the idea of having the woman wield a hammer from a picture in an old biography of Stalin. We thought that if you could vaguely recognize the old machinery, it would give the commercial even more of a mood of nightmarish familiarity."

Even the commercial's sound track, with its roar of heavy machinery and the occasional blast of a coal whistle, is designed to remind viewers of the monotony and menace of a totalitarian society.

"We even researched the Big Brother speech," Hayden said. "I went through all sorts of old propaganda to find a combination of Marxist jingoism and Hitlerian rhetoric."

The commercial's use of a woman athlete to attack Big Brother was a more conscious visual association. "We thought using an athletic young woman would give us the maximum contrast to the gray, lifeless picture we'd painted," Thomas said. "We actually recruited women from a local athletic club—we took them to Hyde Park, let them practice throwing a 10-pound hammer, and gave the woman we eventually cast a week of training with a British Olympic coach."

Now that Apple has everyone's attention, the company will release a new series of more traditional computer ads. But the agency considers its "1984" campaign a resounding success.